



## **City of New Orleans Inauguration**

Mayor Mitchell J. Landrieu

Monday, May 05, 2014

Every morning when my dad woke me up, he said, "Today is the first day of the rest of your life." He taught me to look forward.

Today, as we look forward towards the future, my heart is full of hope because of you the people of New Orleans.

As a city and as a people, we share 300 years of history.

300 years of boom and bust, oppression, revolution, freedom, war, disaster - Betsy, Katrina, the BP oil spill - resurrection and yes redemption.

Uniquely New Orleans, holding tight to our culture and to our way of life.

We're not like other places where the calendar is simply divided between winter, spring, summer or fall.

Here in New Orleans the seasons are crab, crawfish, oyster and shrimp.

We love our Saints so there's pre-season, regular season, post season and off- season.

My favorite season is Super Bowl season / right here in New Orleans.

We are a city of culture and celebration. So we roll from Mardi Gras season to Jazzfest, Spring means Super Sundays Summer - Essence with the Po Boy Festival in between. And a little Louis Armstrong at the end.

And somewhere in between we go to work and we raise our kids.

It's pretty simple - there is no other place like New Orleans in the entire world, and it is our precious home.

Nearly nine years ago, when the levees broke, we all know how close we came to losing her.

But while everything seemed to be falling apart – we did something amazing, we came together because we had to.

We needed each other to survive - to thrive – and out of tragedy we created triumph.

We freed ourselves from death's grip.

But, freedom is not free.

It requires hard work and it requires sacrifice.

And be assured, the fight is not over; the battle for the future of New Orleans goes on.

Now we must focus our efforts as we look forward towards our 300th Anniversary in 2018.

Our mission is to create a City of peace where everyone can thrive and no one is left behind.

Four years from now may seem a long way away, but time flies.

Those 1460 days will pass in a second.

And what will we accomplish in our short time together?

What will we have done to open the circle of opportunity and prosperity to all?

Four years ago, we came together and we declared that the world deserved a better New Orleans.

On that day New Orleans was struggling and we were challenged, all of us, to shift our thinking.

Instead of rebuilding the city that we were, we committed ourselves to building the city we always wanted to be.

And it all began that day four years ago with one single step on the road towards a better future.

Now the path at our backs stretches for many, many miles and we've made tracks.

But the road ahead is long and it is steep.

So what are we to make of our current state of affairs?

Should we be happy or sad? Joyful or sorrowful?

Hopeful or wary, uplifted or beaten down?

Should we acknowledge and succumb to our limitations and just stop, or recognize them, confront them and choose to overcome?

Oh yes we sing 'we shall overcome' - but do we sing it in anguish or do we sing it with confidence and certainty that no matter how low the valley, how wide the river, how dark the night, how dangerous the path - we will find a brighter time, a better place, a better life for each of us and for each of our children.

We are at a crossroads.

Four short years ago, at another fork in the road, we made a choice to put our shoulders against the wheel and to push.

For too long our young people had to leave New Orleans to find opportunity.

Four years ago, we decided that we had to change.

Now opportunities are here – cutting edge biomedical jobs at the new hospitals in New Orleans East and downtown.

Thousands of construction jobs at the new airport, a billion dollars being invested to expand the Port, and New Orleans has become a vibrant hub for young entrepreneurs.

Our major calling, then, for the next four years –keep creating new jobs and make sure everyone can share in the prosperity.

For too long, New Orleans public schools were considered some of the worst in the country.

We made a choice to change.

Graduation rates are up, test scores are up, and dropout rates are down. Our kids are learning.

With us today we have 70 college-bound public high school students from across the city.

Please stand and be recognized.

They are representing the other 2,500 New Orleans graduates in the Class of 2014,

many who will attend some of our nation's finest universities.

Together, they have won \$53 million in scholarships.

So if you don't believe we have changed for the better and are on the right path – look at their faces.

They have proven to us what is possible.

And this is good, but too many of our kids still struggle at failing schools.

In the next four years, let's make a commitment that New Orleans will become the first urban school system in America with no failing schools.

Let us continue down this path so our kids can get a great education, and have a great future.

Every one of them deserves it.

In four short years, we went from having the worst blight problem in America to tearing down or fixing up blight faster than anywhere else in the country.

This is good, but none of this matters if you still have an abandoned house next door to you.

In the next four years, we need to keep going so no one has to live in the shadow of blight.

In four short years – we went from being a city on the financial brink - \$100 million in the red and spending \$5 for every \$4 we took in. Now we have a city with a balanced budget.

This is good. But make no mistake about it, huge challenges remain.

In the next four years, we've got to keep making the tough decisions so we can not only survive, but thrive and control our own destiny.

We must find a way to pay for new, looming liabilities from the fire fighters pension fund and federal consent decrees and build a police department with 1600 officers so we can make our city safe.

And as we grapple with these big new costs and priorities, we can't stop moving forward on all fronts - we need to keep the recovery going.

Indeed, in the last four short years we've gotten back on track with over \$1 billion dollars

hitting the ground.

For evidence of our progress, look no further than this remarkable Saenger Theatre along with the new streets, playgrounds, police and fire stations, parks and libraries, which are now anchoring all of our neighborhoods.

These investments, plus another \$1 billion to replace the Big 4 housing developments, means better housing, safer neighborhoods, stronger families, and a stronger New Orleans.

Take a ride to see these new housing developments --Columbia Parc, Harmony Oaks, Faubourg Lafitte, and Marrero Commons.

These are real life examples of building back not as we were but as we dreamed we could be.

And most importantly, throughout the last four years, we have changed.

Instead of running away from the problem, now we run towards the fire and we take on the toughest of issues, refusing to kick the can down the road.

And there is no tougher issue for us than violence.

In 2010, New Orleans was America's murder capital.

But no more - murder is at a historic near 30 year low.

This is good, lives have been saved.

But, still too many lives are being lost on the streets of New Orleans.

Indeed, on this issue we face a very stark contradiction.

From the rich soil of New Orleans comes our great prides – our close knit neighborhoods, our Second Lines, our cooking, our music, our love and warmth of our families and friends.

We love each other hard here.

But from this same fertile ground, from this same remarkable place grows an ominous poisonous fruit planted from the seeds of violence that have taken root.

This death and destruction will only end if we tear that noxious weed out by the root.

We each must join the growing chorus of those who have said – enough!

We have to stop the shooting.

We have to stop the violence.

We have to stop the madness.

New Orleans can and will become a city of peace.

But this challenge, like so many we face, is generations in the making and will not be solved overnight.

We are on the right path, but again we are now at a crucial moment where the road diverges from what has been, to what can be.

In these seasons of change we must make a choice – keep going forward or turn back.

After years of trial by fire, we as a people have changed – New Orleans, we as a people have now found a new way.

The old way of ‘divide and conquer’ is gone, replaced with a new unity of purpose.

Old mistrust between business and government gives way to the mutual benefits of cooperation.

The wounds of yesterday are starting to heal – differences of faith, race or neighborhood give way to higher common ground and to a shared humanity.

This is the new way – New Orleans, we have changed.

This is why we are winning.

We are united like never before and there is a simple premise that unites us - we all want the same thing - a bright future for our kids, economic opportunity, safe neighborhoods.

And now we realize that only by working together can we truly make this happen.

We cannot move forward... unless we all move forward together.

And in our long history whenever we have been united as one...we win.

If it was not clear already, let me say here and now to all who will listen - we in New Orleans have made our choice!

We have gotten used to winning.

We have changed.

We are pressing on.

And we will not look back.

We have become a city that has chosen to light a candle rather than curse the darkness.

In time for our 300th anniversary, we can create the New Orleans we always dreamed she should be -  
a city where everyone can thrive and no one is left behind.

We must keep moving forward and continue to turn this dream into a reality... because something else is happening in New Orleans on this day...a child is being born.

For the first time, a new mother and father hold their baby close.

In this moment, a family is made and a precious seed is planted and a root takes hold.

In this moment, anything feels possible.

In this moment, dreams are launched and the journey begins from a joyous birth towards the bright visions of what tomorrow may bring.

This one child holds with her the hopes and dreams of not just a family, but of a whole city.

She is depending on us, and we are depending on her.

And many years from now, when we pass her the baton, we will know that we ran our leg of the race with everything that we've got, so that she begins, not behind, but ahead of the pack, with a real shot at winning.

Because of the bravery, sacrifice and vision of those who came before us, this child already enters a world that looks so different from the world of just a generation before.

Just think – the only world this child knows is one where the Saints are the Super Bowl champions,  
the President of the United States is African American, and New Orleans is a city on the rise.

We are deeply grateful for those who fought the battles of yesterday so we can be here today.

We should also think of our friends and family not here today because they were taken before their time by violence.

Let us also remember those who never emerged from Katrina's waters; those chased out by the storm  
and those who did not return.

The best way to honor their lives and legacy is to fight for that child that is born today.

We have the power to make a difference.

We can determine our path and our destiny, so we should do so.

The world is what we will make of it.

It is a world of tragedy and triumph, peace and war, pain and beauty.

It is an imperfect world, but one where we can make a choice and find a way to rid ourselves of bigotry, hatred, and inequality.

There is hope.

There is a way.

A new way.

Today New Orleans is strong, resting on the core bedrock of our unique culture, our diversity and, above all, our uncompromising optimism and belief in God and our future.

Today, I ask all of you gathered here – let us keep pressing on and recommit ourselves to creating a city where no one gets left behind.

Every generation comes to this point – every generation is given a moment to bend that arc of history.

And 300 years from now when historians look back they will remember how we the people of New Orleans - in this moment, in this time - came together to do what was hard for the sake of doing what was right and gave light and freedom, goodness and life to those generations we do not yet know.

This is our mission, this is our responsibility, it is our burden.



But it is a sweet burden.

I am thankful, as we all should be that we have been given the chance, the opportunity to bear the burden for those yet to come.

We will all be better for it.

New Orleans has long been a place where the promise of a better tomorrow always seems just beyond our grasp.

Not anymore- our time has come.

Four years ago, we came together and we made a choice to be one team, one fight, one voice, one city.

We changed and forged a new way, a path to higher common ground.

When this child was born, a seed was planted and took root.

To become the city we always dreamed we should be, it is here where we must focus our efforts.

It is here, with this young man and in the hearts and minds of children across the city, where our future will be decided.

It is here, with the outstanding college class of 2018.

Indeed, it is a simple, solemn promise we make to this next generation – we will find a way or we will make one so each of you can reach ever greater heights.

With God's grace we can become that shining city on a hill.

Four years ago we began with one step-one team, one fight, one voice, one city -- one single step.

Four years ago, together we took that first step and through all our trials and tribulations, we have overcome.

Now together we must press on.

We will not turn back.

For our children's sake and for all those who will come after.

Let's keep going, New Orleans.

Let's take another step, New Orleans.

Let's create the city we always dreamed we could be, New Orleans.

We have changed.

We will win.

We will press on.

And we will not look back --today is the first day of the rest of our lives.

And our best days are yet to come.

Let's get back to work.

Thank you again and God Bless.